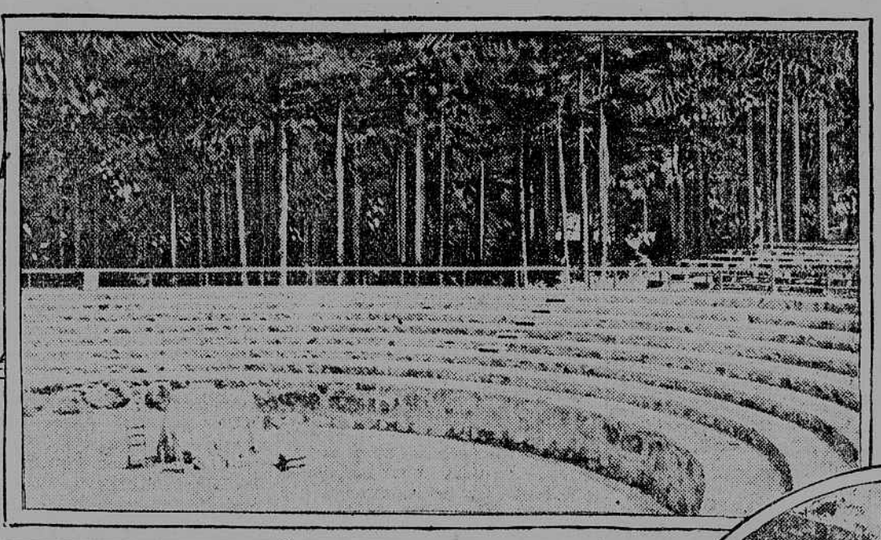
MacDowell Colony No Place for the Bohemian; Arcadian Retreat Is Open Only to the Worker

HILLCREST, the MacDowell home at Peterborough, N. H.

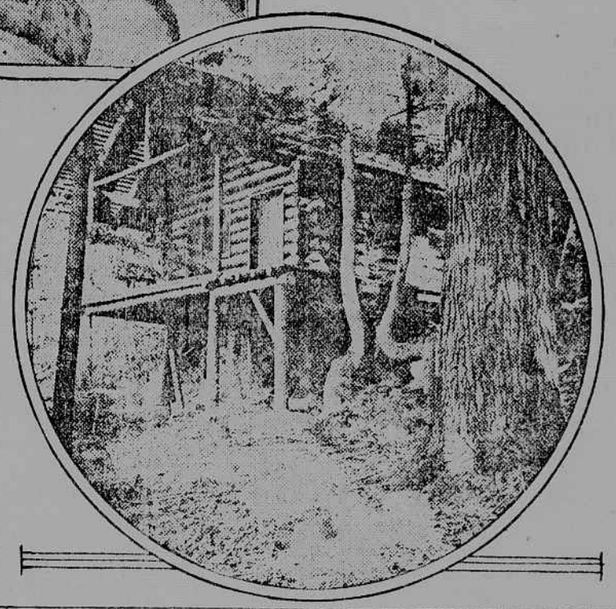
ONE of the studios at the MacDowell Colony. Each visitor has a cottage of his own, and it is an unbreakable rule that no one shall visit another's cottage without a distinct invitation

THe dining hall at the MacDowell Colony, where dinner is served. A luncheon is carried to each colonist at noon in order that he may be disturbed as little as possible



THE John W. Alexander Memorial Studio, now in course of construction at MacDowell Colony

THE stadium in the woods where outdoor programs are held



THIS is the log cabin in which MacDowell the composer worked. It is the nucleus of the present colony

By Theodore Maynard
Author of "Poems," "Carven From the Laurel Tree," etc.

CONSISTENT good fortune has been mine since my arrival in America, but no good fortune has been better than that which brought me to the MacDowell Colony, in Peterborough, N. H.

Just at the moment when I felt that there must be some place more suitable for literary work than New York in summer, though I had no idea where that place could be, the casual remark of a friend gave me the hint I wanted. My ears instantly picked up. And I put a number of questions, all of which cautiously led up to the supreme question of whether I could go to the place of which my friend had been speaking. For answer I was given Mrs. MacDowell's address, and I wrote, stating my needs and asking if she could supply them. The letter she sent back modestly assured me that I would find at least some of the things I was seeking at Peterborough. My experience has shown me that I have found all of those things.

The Haven of the Woods

Everybody who has tried to do any kind of creative work under the stress and strain of modern life must have been met by the difficulties which Edward MacDowell, the composer, met and solved in his log cabin in the woods of New Hampshire. I had found a partial solution of them in England, where I enjoyed the privilege of inviting myself to a monastery whenever I was under the necessity of working without interruption. But I knew no indulgent monks in America, and even had I been able to discover solitude in a cell, though it had been among the unspeaking Trappists, its silence could not have been so complete as that which exists in the little studios that are hidden from the world and from each other amid the pines of Peterborough. In a monastery there would have been footfalls along the stone floors of the cloister; here every step is made noiseless by a thick carpet of pine needles.

In an article written on life in the colony, contributed to The North American Review by Mr. Edwin Arlington Robinson, he speaks of "the abrupt and somewhat humiliating sense of isolation, liberty and opportunity which overtakes one each morning." The unaccustomed isolation strikes one with awkwardness at first; there is so much liberty and opportunity that until equilibrium has been gained they cannot be used to advantage. The fever of cities must subside before the cool peace of the great hills can take possession of the soul. But when peace comes it brings with it a new energy, and the work done day by day in the lonely studio is restful work, because it springs out of a perfect adjustment of the personality to its surroundings.

Neither Camp nor Campus

That is the desired result. To indicate the machinery—only the machinery, it should be remembered—by which it is attained, I had better describe the external manner of our living. First, it should be borne in mind that the MacDowell Colony is neither a camp nor a campus. That is to say, there is a regularity and a permanence about all that it does which marks it off from the camp; and there is an entire absence of the formality of the college campus. The studios are not laid out in symmetrical rows, and they cannot be included in a bird's-eye view. Thank God for that!

There are no makeshifts at Peterborough. The members of the colony rise from good beds in charming rooms to breakfast at a little before 8 in the Colony Hall, a comfortable house fitted with all the conveniences and managed with all the efficiency that any city dweller could expect. Then, breakfast at an end, the residents go off quietly to their studios until 6 o'clock, when they meet again for dinner.

To insure a long, fruitful working day a light lunch is brought in a basket to each studio by a messenger at noon. And further to prevent interruption there is a rule—almost the only rule of the colony—that no member must visit another in his workshop unless he is definitely invited there.

But though this rule, like all the arrangements of the colony, is designed to protect the worker's freedom, it ought not to be inferred that each member lives like a disgruntled Diogenes in a tub, even though it be a spacious tub with a fireplace, mosquito screens and a veranda. There is plenty of pleasant social intercourse in the evenings when the community (or such part of it as chooses to do so) gathers in the large Regina Watson studio, while those who prefer it seek the poolroom. But though the amenities of life at Peterborough are considerable, they are only incidental to its main purpose, which is the provision of opportunities for work, not compulsion. People could come here and be absolutely lazy if they liked; but somehow nobody is lazy here. There seems to be no escape from the infection of industry.

How to Get In

The secret of it all is that those who are admitted to the colony have to be in earnest. There are two ways, and only two, by which an entrance may be won. A man has either to be a creative artist who is able to point to an achievement of recognized importance, or he must find two creative artists of standing who are prepared to say that he promises such an achievement. The amateur and the novice are alike ineligible.

The question of money simply does not arise. Some of those who are admitted are poor, and for their benefit the charge made for board is nominal, but the same charge is made to the prosperous member of the colony. No inquiry is made as to the financial position; lack or possession of means count for nothing: the single qualification is artistic ability.

I was just a little afraid before I came that there would be a certain amount of æsthetic attitudinizing, a tincture of Greenwich Village and Bohemia about Peterborough. Never was I more agreeably mistaken. The poets, dramatists, novelists, composers, painters and sculptors who come here have too much to do to adopt artistic postures. And, strange as it may appear, there are no quarrels or passionate scandals at Peterborough. There isn't time enough for that sort of thing.

Even the Cook Artistic

There is, on the other hand, a complete absence of every variety of snobbery. Men and women are on terms of easy comradeship. Famous and obscure artists are on an equality. And the employees who look after our material necessities form part of what is a family. They also seem to understand the true nature of art. Our wonderful cook, Mary, spoke to me yesterday of some one having an inspiration in much the same matter-of-fact tone that she would use about some one having a bath.

Perhaps the best way of accounting for the success of the enterprise is by saying that its spirit is the spirit of Edward MacDowell. The colony is the MacDowell Colony. Cause and effect are intimately bound together in its history. More than thirty years ago the composer and his wife, young and without money, came to Peterborough to find quiet for work. They found it in such quantities that six years later they decided to buy a little farm which was offered for sale at a price low enough for their purse. Here MacDowell built the log cabin, which is still standing and which will be preserved as a shrine, and in it he wrote much of his best music.

After MacDowell's death his widow, knowing how much the log cabin had meant to him, went to the committee which was administering the fund of $30,000 which had been subscribed to establish a memorial to the composer and by dint of determined persuasion managed to induce them to invest it in "the Peterborough idea." By it she was able to make possible for others what her husband had gained for himself—conditions under which good work could be produced.

But though the memorial fund was a beginning it was not the end. Very slowly, and always under difficulties, the scheme has grown, probably with more sureness because of its slowness. It had to become known, and could not afford to spend money in advertising. And having become known, it had to prove that it was worth knowing. It had to be able to say:

"Here we have a number of artists whose art has been produced under the conditions the colony provides. They will testify to the value of the colony."

There are a number of such artists, men and women who regard Peterborough as their alma mater, and as time goes on that number will increase, for it should not be forgotten that the scheme is still in its infancy. The worst of its difficulties have been overcome, but the need of a larger endowment than it possesses remains. This is why the MacDowell Association is appealing to lovers of American art to help them to raise the sum of $200,000 in order to develop the undertaking and to put it on a secure financial footing.

Year by year the colony has grown, so that now instead of the one studio with which it commenced twelve years ago it has fifteen well built and well equipped studios. Year by year the colony has grown, so that it is able to select its members more carefully than it could at first, when people were frequently admitted, for lack of better material, who most certainly would not be admitted now. The standard is being steadily raised, and a time is rapidly approaching when membership in the MacDowell Colony will carry with it academical distinction. Already it is a privilege; then it will be an honor.

Plans for the Future

The activities of the association, moreover, are widening, and will widen further as the necessary funds are forthcoming. For example, not only will dramatists write plays in their studios (as they do at present); they will train their actors here. A magnificent stone open air amphitheater is already erected (a gift from the National Federation of Musical Clubs), and a covered theater is projected.

To take another example of the colony's increasing and widening energy: The John W. Alexander Memoral Studio is now in process of building—a beautiful stone structure which is a replica of the chapel at Saas Fee, in Switzerland. It is proposed to hold in it periodical exhibitions of American paintings and sculpture, and by these means to provide what so many struggling artists urgently need—a medium by which they may be introduced to their undiscovered patrons.

There is nothing in the least fanciful or futile about any of these projects, for those who will carry them out are men and women who are practical artists and people of sound executive ability. They know what should be done and they know how to set about doing it.

In Absolute Privacy

I am not, however, primarily concerned with the plans which the directors of the MacDowell Association hope to carry into effect in the future. Though these are altogether praiseworthy and attractive of interest, the essential policy of the colony must remain what it is. However widely it may extend its center will always be the individual studio where the artist works in silence and seclusion from morning until evening at the perfecting of his own art. Here he withdraws, as into a cell, with no companionship except his thoughts and dreams, and here he strives until he can give them their desired form. From his window he may look abroad and see, through a rift in the woods, Mount Monadnock, lying in misty blue against the sky. Or he may be so shut in that thick woods stand about him on every hand. Either situation is good. I am not prepared to say which is better.

I have already spoken of the infection of industry and of the presence of MacDowell's spirit at Peterborough. I cannot help feeling that there is some link between the two things, and that their union will result in a reinvigoration of American art. The colony is attached to no school of æsthetics, and each of its members is free to follow the method he prefers.

But there is a unity here, not of method but of purpose, though that purpose is largely unconscious, as it was with MacDowell himself. He was an American who had lived for some time in Europe. Such Americans quite commonly bring back a vulgar contempt for what they are pleased to consider the crudities of their country, and this generally induces an inability to appreciate their country's excellences.

Felt America's Romance

MacDowell was much too great a man to fall into this error. He felt the romance of America, and was as much excited by the ruins of an early settler's cabin in the woods as by the ruins of an English castle. This strong and very fine sentiment came out clearly in his compositions which have in them an element of what can only be called folklore. This was, in my opinion, the thing he was especially called to express. Whether he knew that he was expressing it I do not know. But I do know that he found it among the same hills, the same woods where other native American artists are finding it to-day. And the stray English poet who has the good fortune to enjoy an experience to which, I suspect, he is not strictly entitled, must have his life and art enriched by what is rooted in this alien soil.

Furthermore, because I am an Englishman I am sufficiently detached to look at the MacDowell Colony more impartially, perhaps, than could others who are too closely associated with it not to be suspected of a natural prejudice in its favor. Consequently—as it is the prerogative of an Englishman to publish his views frankly—I put my enthusiasm down on record, and say that I can conceive of nothing that is more likely to have a salutary effect on the artistic output of this country than what is being done at Peterborough.

The training of artists is another story. It is not attempted here, and I do not think it could be attempted. The colony exists to provide those who are already trained, those who have already achieved work upon which the best contemporary criticism has put its approving seal, with opportunities for production they could not obtain elsewhere. They will come here and enter into a circle of fellow artists whose society will be a stimulus, a society whose members do and will expect others to do the best of which they are capable, and in his isolated studio every colonist will discover (often to his surprise) a new incentive and a new inspiration. It is a noble ideal, one that deserves and needs outside support.

Eckenfelder, War Hero, Back in His Little Shop

THE happy ending of one of the most thrilling episodes of the great war is told by H. B. M. in The Manchester Guardian. The correspondent, who dates his story from Alberta, Canada, writes:

In his butcher's shop in the little Albertan village of Trochu, not far from the foothills of the Canadian Rockies, I met the other day a man who unfolded to me a little epic of the war—Major Leon Eckenfelder, that battalion commander of the French army whom Sir Arthur Conan Doyle visited in the Argonne and to whom he makes striking reference in his history, On Three Fronts.

I had gone into the butcher's shop in Trochu to inquire my way about the village. I waited a few moments while the proprietor sliced and parceled a round steak for his customer, an outlying rancher. I heard the butcher quietly assure his inquisitive patron that he had indeed been "three years battalion commander in the Argonne." I edged closer to the counter.

This village butcher in central Alberta a major in the army of France? I was to learn by dint of questioning that brought, sometimes, an answer, but more often a modest and non-committal shrug of the shoulders, that he had been more than that—a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, a member of the Military Mission of France to the United States, with the Croix de Guerre and two "citations" for "incomparable conduct while in command of his battalion."

Accustomed, as I was, to the speedy "reëstablishment" of Canadian soldiers, I was surprised, and when the garrulous rancher left with his pound of steak I said so. My friend the butcher smiled in evident embarrassment.

"Yes, it is true," he said, taking off his apron and coming from behind his block to shake my hand. "I was Major Eckenfelder. Now, you see I am Eckenfelder the butcher. I am back at work."

With a gesture eloquent of other days before those at Trochu he motioned me to a seat in the little room at the rear where he "kept the books," and there I heard from too modest lips the marvelous story of a Canadian ranching village.

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To the plains and foothills of the Province of Alberta had come, in 1904, a handful of French army officers, one of them Leon Charles Eckenfelder, then lieutenant in the 7th Hussars of France. Some of the party already were on the reserve of officers, while others were on three years' leave of absence; all accepted the leadership in their new surroundings of an elderly compatriot, M. Armand Trochu, from whom the settlement took its name. In the original party, in addition to the two already named, were Jean de Beaudrap and his brother René, Philippe Batruille, Xavier Beaudry and Michel de Roussy, son of Le Marquis de Roussy de Sales; Papillard, De Torquat and one who came some years later, Feline.

A rare character, Feline, lieutenant of cavalry, a Frenchman who knew that some day the call of La Patrie would ring far across Canada, even to the foothills of the Rockies, and who carried with him in an old dunnage bag his cavalry boots and a good deal of his military accoutrement.

Six or eight years went by, and Trochu, now a fair-sized village, knew nothing but happiness. Wives and families had come from Old France to join husbands and fathers, most of whom had resigned their commissions and gone on the reserve. Seed-time and harvest came in their season, and year by year this little colony of France found itself merging more and more with its Western environment.

The ranchers living near at hand, many of them former soldiers of the British army of peace times, were kindly and neighborly; the children of these French families learned the English language in a small Canadian country school; their parents came to speak and think of Canada as "home," and all idea of return to life in France departed from their minds. Diligent industry brought its rich rewards, and in the humble homes of Trochu were peace and prosperity.

Then came the day when a telegram from the French consul brought the news. It found twelve men ready. Britain had not yet declared war. Canada was still at peace, but not Trochu. The call had come, and that call knew but one answer. In a few hours hasty preparations were completed, final directions were given to trembling women, and farewells filled a few agonizing moments. In the gray dawn of an early August day twelve men, ex-officers of the army of France, slipped quietly away from Trochu, leaving in all the sadness of exile the wives and children who had shared their pioneering on the Albertan prairie. At Calgary, the provincial capital, the party was reinforced by other French and Belgian reservists and left immediately for France, with Baron Roels, a Flemish millionaire, in the capacity of cook and lieutenant, and Eckenfelder, of the 7th Hussars of France, as quartermaster sergeant.

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As worthy one small chapter in the book of Canada's war service, I pass on this brief record of a Canadian village that came into existence but ten years before the war; a little straggling cluster of frame shacks on an Albertan hillside, in whose homes was kept alive the sacred fire of patriotism—a shining love of country that, with the passing years, comes to mean not love of France the less, but love of Canada more.

Village Has a Cat Plague

GREENWICH VILLAGE'S great midsummer night feline orchestra is in full blast. It is the downtown competitor of the Stadium concerts. Anybody can hear it. It begins at midnight and ends just a little before daylight. Admission is free. Oldtime villagers assert that for piercing volume, sustained discord and diversity of unharmonized notes it breaks the records of all previous years. It provokes nightmares and makes painful any contemplation relative to the prospect of having to go to bed.

In plain words, the village is suffering from a plague of homeless cats. Attracted, doubtless, by the village's growing reputation as a select neighborhood and a more negligent attitude on the part of extravagant kitchen maids as to what goes into the garbage pails, the cats are invading the village from the less hospitable contiguous regions. They are arriving from the Italian quarter south of the village, which has become too congested for their playful pursuits, and from the wholesale districts around Broadway, where they were once permitted to propagate provided they confined their diet exclusively to mice.

The result is that the village is now pestered with more stray cats than Constantinople ever was with stray dogs. The iron railings and front stairways on the old-fashioned houses furnish sufficient protection to the cats in the day time, but if some nocturnal census taker should saunter forth with a pad and pencil after midnight he could accumulate an astonishing array of feline statistics.

He would discover that an average block has about one cat for every front doorstep. They travel in cliques of about three to a block, each clique making its avowed and irrevocable purpose to outcaterwaul the other. But the combined vocal efforts of three cliques on a block caterwauling simultaneously is comparatively mild. The real cat demonstration takes place when two blocks join forces or when a group of blocks get together. In fact, a Greenwich Villager sitting on his roof to seek relief from a superheated evening may hear rise from the streets, alleys and back yards below, as if from some maniacal syncopated orchestra, a blended outburst of excruciating sounds hopelessly irrepressible.

"What's the use?" muses the villager. "If I heave a brick at 'em I'm likely to kill somebody."

Satisfied of the hopelessness of dealing with the cat problem, the villager sits back and suffers. Throwing things is utterly out of the question. If these were the days of the traditions of the comic weeklies, when a cat-tortured sleeper was pictured throwing a boot out of the window, the village streets every morning would be cluttered with footgear. Any dealer in second hand shoes strolling around at daylight would be able to gather in a rich harvest of shoes, slippers and boots. But in deference to the high cost of footwear and unwilling to part with any of its pink teapots or yellow soup bowls, Greenwich Village restrains itself. So the cat population multiplies.